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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: A/S Blake Meets with Leaders of Uzbek Parliament

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During his three-day visit to Tashkent, A/S Blake met with the leaders of both houses of the Uzbek parliament: the Speaker of the Oliy Majlis (the lower house), and the President of the Senate. Both seemed interested in developing greater ties with their counterparts in the U.S. Congress, including possible exchanges. A/S Blake expressed his support for their efforts toward democratization, as well as the Administration's desire to elevate and expand U.S.-Uzbek relations across the full range of issues. It is high time a CoDel come back to Uzbekistan. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Uzbekistan only adopted a bicameral system in 2005, and the legislative chamber is still developing as the law-making branch of the parliament. Its leader, Speaker Dilmurod Tashmuhamedova, is a dynamic woman who touted the country's legal reforms, its ratification of several international treaties, and its progress in the human dimension. She talked about the upcoming December elections, stating that she is confident that they will be free and transparent. She also stated that enhanced cooperation with the United States would be most welcome, as would exchange programs at the parliamentary level. A/S Blake encouraged her to write a letter to Speaker Nancy Pelosi to propose such an exchange.

¶3. (SBU) Senate President Ilgizar Sobirov described the procedures in the Senate, noting that it has no role in drafting legislation, but approves and rejects proposals from the lower house. He also described how citizens, including the youth, can come to the Senate every day to meet with their representatives and air their grievances. Sobirov shared his enthusiasm for meeting with counterparts to discuss areas for cooperation and collaboration. A/S Blake encouraged him to write to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to see what kinds of collaboration might be possible.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Although the exchanges during these meetings were not particularly policy-oriented, there was good value in meeting with these leaders of the Oliy Majlis and the Senate, who will have a role in any presidential succession process. Both are looking to professionalize their institutions and to make democratic reforms in the country. Some sort of exchange of expertise could serve both to help develop institutions here, as well as to advance our interests in civil society and human rights. It is high time a CoDel come back to Uzbekistan. End comment.

